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DR. ABRAHAM JACOBI (1830-1919)

DR. ABRAHAM JACOBI, the father and founder of American pediatrics, died at his summer home at Bolton Landing, N. Y., on July 10, at the age of eighty-nine years.

Dr. Jacobi was born of Jewish parents in the village of Hartum, Westphalia, on May 6, 1830. His people were not well-to-do, his education was accomplished through privation and struggle, but he early acquired a knowledge of Latin, and, after the usual courses of instruction in the village school and the Gymnasium at Minden, he went to the University of Greifswald, in 1847, at the age of seventeen, to matriculate as a student of Oriental languages. Becoming interested in medicine, he turned to anatomy and physiology. Following the peripatetic plan of the German student, he proceeded to Göttingen, where he came under Frerichs and Woehler, winding up his course at Bonn, where he graduated in 1851, with a Latin dissertation "*Cogitationes de vita rerum naturalium*," which has considerable philosophic depth. In the meantime, the Revolution of 1848 had broken out and run its course, and in this brief drive for liberty, Jacobi, with Ferdinand Freiligrath, Karl Marx, Carl Schurz and others, had been a leading spirit. When he went to Berlin, to take his state examination, he was apprehended by the Prussian authorities, imprisoned for a year and a half in a German fortress at Cologne, convicted of *lèse majesté*, and again held in detention for six months at Minden. In 1853, through the friendship of his jailer, he managed to escape, took ship at Hamburg, and after some vicissitudes in England and New England, settled down to practise at 20 Howard Street, New York. Here, beginning with such modest fees as 25 and 50 cents for office and house visits, five to ten dollars for obstetric cases, he soon

managed to make a living. In the first year of his practise, he made \$973.25. During the next year (1854), he invented a laryngoscope of his own, which was unfortunately not ever patented or made public before the appearance of Manuel Garcia's instrument (1855). By 1857, Jacobi was lecturing on pediatrics in the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New York. This was the starting point of clinical and scientific pediatrics in this country. In this branch of medicine, Jacobi had only one other American colleague (in no sense a rival or competitor), the devoted and unworldly J. Lewis Smith, whose famous treatise of 1869 passed through eight editions. In 1860, Jacobi was called to the first special chair of diseases of children in the New York Medical College; in 1861, Smith became clinical professor of pediatrics in the Bellevue Hospital College. In 1865, Jacobi took the clinical chair of his subject in the medical department of the University of New York. In 1870, he became clinical professor of pediatrics in the College of Physicians and Surgeons (1870-99). Officially, he taught pediatrics in New York for nearly half a century, actually, all his working life.

In 1862, Jacobi established a pediatric clinic in the New York Medical College Building in East 13th Street, which ran for two years. In this way, bedside teaching in pediatrics antedated bedside teaching in internal medicine in the United States.

Meanwhile, Jacobi had been an active and brilliant contributor to medical literature. In 1859, he published a volume of "*Contributions to Midwifery and Diseases of Women and Children*," with Emil Noeggerath,¹ who was

¹ Author of the now well-established theory of the latency of gonorrhœa in unsuspected carriers (1872), which has been of great moment in the science of causation of pelvic disease in women.

to be Jacobi's coadjutor in founding the *American Journal of Obstetrics* (1862). During 1859-1903, Jacobi wrote much on diphtheria, and published successive treatises on diseases of the larynx (1859), dentition and its derangements (1862), infant diet (1872), diphtheria (1876), intestinal diseases of infancy and childhood (1887), diseases of the thymus gland (1889) and therapeutics of infancy and childhood (1896-1903). The tendency of these books is mainly practical, to spread the pediatric doctrine as applied science. The treatise on infantile therapeutics is, in reality, a treatise on pediatrics, summarizing the author's views and revealing his wide knowledge of the literature. To the medical periodicals, Jacobi contributed many papers, including his more original observations of infantile disease. His most enduring contributions to his science are perhaps the three monographs in the Gerhardt "Handbuch" on infant hygiene (1876), diphtheria (1877) and dysentery (1877). These, the products of a man approaching fifty, have all the force and fire of youth. To the history of pediatrics, Jacobi contributed the most important American papers, notably his St. Louis address (1904), two authoritative histories of American pediatrics (1902, 1913), a history of cerebrospinal meningitis in America (1905) and a history of pediatrics in New York City (1917). In sixty-six years of active practise he wrote an enormous number of miscellaneous papers of the most varied kind, most of which have been gathered in eight volumes ("Collectanea Jacobi," 1909). These include some of the wisest and wittiest discourses in medical literature. As a pendant to the festal volume presented to him on his seventieth birthday (1900), it had been proposed to commemorate his ninetieth birthday with another memorial volume containing a complete bibliography of his writings, to be followed by a selection of his best utterances, such as Camac has culled from the writings of Osler. No more fitting tribute to Jacobi's memory could now be made.

In 1873, Dr. Jacobi married Miss Mary C. Putnam, who was one of the first lady graduates in medicine (1870), and became herself a famous physician.

Dr. Jacobi was of short, slight but elastic frame, his whole person dominated by the large, splendid head, leonine, magisterial, with its crown of hair, the living embodiment of some great high-priest of knowledge of old. The earlier portraits betoken extraordinary vigor of mind and body, and even in his declining years, his cheerful tenacity of life was with him to the last. There came the inevitable lines in the face, "which years, and curious thought, and suffering give," but the expression of the wonderful eyes, subtle, humorous, pathetic, the eyes of the physician who is also philosopher, did not change. He was large-minded, big-hearted, intensely human, his conversation flavored with delightful banter, the tricky humors of dainty Ariel or frolic Puck. With women and young people, in particular, his captivating charm of manner was unfailing. If it be true that "the old are natural enemies of the young," he was one of the delightful exceptions. With his broad background of culture, his knowledge and achievement, he had ever a delicate, ironic trait of genuine modesty, with which any reference to his own performance was inevitably tinctured, the modesty of those who, in the words of the Italian poet, "continually compare themselves, not with other men, but with their own ideal of perfection." In a private letter, he mourns "my constant routine work in daily practise for sixty years, that kept me in solitude, away from the good and great men, ever away from music and literature, and away from those who called me friend." His fidelity to duty was that of Browning's Corregidor. Yet he was a member, frequently president, of many medical societies, and a constant participant in their meetings. It is characteristic of the man that he once gravely rebuked me for disinclination to attend such meetings, although my excuse, as a non-practitioner, was perfectly valid. Characteristic also was his vein of thought, spontaneous as a flight of birds, with its omnipresent humor, a trait which made for perfect poise and sanity. His quaint remarks, at an alumni dinner, about the poultry in Lohengrin recall the well-known witticism of Lady Duckle

in "Evelyn Innes." At the age of eighty-seven, he wrote:

When old ladies believe in the efficacy of hot chamomile tea, no matter whether they mean Roman or vulgar flowers, in fever and in belly ache, you hope that not many of that class of old ladies are left. I have survived them.

As sometimes happens with those who have come to us "bringing gifts in their hands," Jacobi was, in helpful, unlifting citizenship, an inspiring example. He once said to me, very simply: "I am a Hebrew by race, but not clannish, not a sectarian." His adaptation to environment was, as in Osler's case, that of a colonial or continental American. In actuality, he belonged to the nobler ante-bellum generation which produced the "Lees, Lincolns, Shermans and Grants." The fact was written in his face. He had nothing either of the *vieux bonze* or of the smart, metallic, business manner of the *arriviste*. His civic courage was of the highest order. Not even the offer of Henoeh's chair in Berlin could induce him to give up the ideals of his fiery youth, or to desert the country of his adoption, a sign that real character does not change: *Genio y figura, hasta la muerte*. One was frequently impressed with his facial likeness to the novelist Turgenieff, who, in a less personal and forth-right way, was also a protagonist of civil and personal liberty, and in whom there was the same elusive irony and spontaneity of thought. One recalls the immortal words pronounced by

Renan in the Gare du Nord over the bier of the great Russian, once defined as "the best that human nature is capable of":

Il fût d'une race par sa manière de sentir et de peindre; il appartenait à l'humanité tout entière par une haute philosophie, envisageant d'un œil ferme les conditions de l'existence humaine et cherchant sans parti pris à savoir la réalité. Cette philosophie aboutissait chez lui à la douceur, à la joie de vivre, à la pitié, chez les créatures, pour les victimes surtout. Cette pauvre humanité, souvent aveugle assurément, mais si souvent aussi trahie par ses chefs, il l'aimait ardemment. Il applaudissait à son effort spontané vers le bien et le vrai. . . . La politique de fer qui raille ceux que souffrent n'était pas la sienne. Aucune déception ne l'arrêtait. Comme l'univers, il eût recommencé mille fois l'œuvre manquée; il savait que la justice peut attendre.²

As a soldier of the common good, as one to whom thousands of mothers and children in his city owe so much, it needs but the slightest alteration of the poet's lines to define what Jacobi stood for:

Duty divine and Thought with eyes of fire,
Still following Righteousness with deep desire
Shone sole and stern before him and above
Sure stars and sole to steer by; but more sweet
Shone lower the loveliest lamp for earthly feet—
The light of little children, and their love.

F. H. GARRISON

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² E. Renan, "Adieu à Tourguénieff," October 1, 1883.

